

EXHIBIT A

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The Importance of Extended Families in the African American Community: A Qualitative Analysis Using Social Learning Theory

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Abstract

Since the beginning of time the concept of a family has changed dramatically, especially in the African American community. The family is the most important institution that makes up a society. There are two main types of families: (1) an extended family consisting of multiple generations- aunts, uncles, grandparents etc., and (2) a nuclear family that consist primarily of a mother and father figure. The concept of an extended family arose as economic troubles began to occur. Slowly over time, the concept of extended families began to vanish. The problem with this is that children are starting to lose the true value of family benevolence. The Social Learning Theory states that people learn behaviors based on the action of people around them. Using Social Learning Theory, this paper hypothesizes that if more African American communities start to utilize the extended family rather than the nuclear family, then they will have more of a sense of togetherness in their families. Using the extended family concept is beneficial in a plethora of ways. Economically, for instance, the extended family raises more money to provide for the family rather than other forms of families. Collecting qualitative data through the use of the document analysis technique and conducting interviews, my hypothesis found to be tenable that extended families are more beneficial and should be the ideal view of a family.

Keywords: Extended Families, Nuclear Families, Community

1. Introduction

The root of every community is based on the concept of a family. Over many decades, the ideal view of what a family should be has changed dramatically. Extended families vs. nuclear families, which one is more effective in raising a family? Extended families are defined as a family consisting of multiple generations under one roof. The concept of extended families was very common especially in the African American community. In the 1880s, the idea of extended families was widely spread and began to outweigh the number of nuclear families of that time period.

Extended families were highly beneficial because they led to less economic troubles and a more effective way to raise children. As a result of urbanization, higher education and industrialization there became a decrease in extended families and an increase in African American nuclear families. With the major decrease in extended families also came an increase of single-parent households, low-income families, and a higher crime rate in the African American community.

African Americans have lost the true value of the family as an institution. From the 1880s to now, family as a concept has declined dramatically, statistics show this statement to be true. The Social Learning Theory supports the view that people learn behaviors based on the actions of the people around them. This theory would show that if people are surrounded around their family members that are raising them in a positive manner, they will instill the behaviors and morals of those around them.

The major research questions investigated in this paper are as follows: (1) What events triggered the major decline of extended families? (2) Is there a correlation between the rise in low-income families and the decrease in extended families? (3) If more African American families used the extended family model instead of the nuclear family model, would that change the economy today? This paper is therefore important because it focuses on the absolute concept of a family. It also attempts to find the importance of why African Americans need to rely on extended families to build a feeling of togetherness.

2. Literature Review

Extended families have played a significantly large role in shaping the true meaning of what a family is. The concept of an extended family has come to a significant decline. This decline has caused African Americans to virtually lose the true value of the family as an institution drastically since the 1880s. The following literature review uses a chronological approach to examine multiple examples on this topic.

As stated in this paper the concept of extended families was beneficial in times of economic hardships. In a book written by Gary R. Lee entitled *Family Structure and Interaction* (1982) Lee argues that “extended families would be important for people living in poverty because it makes it easier to share resources.” This book further states that the concept of nuclear families derived from the rise in industrialization.

Robert Bernard Hill conducted a research experiment not only focusing on the problems faced by black families but he recommended practical actions that can be taken to better the conditions of black families. In his book *Research on the African-American Family* (1993) Hill stated that over time the increase in unemployment, single parent homes, teenage pregnancies, and violence created some of the problems that African American families are facing in today’s society. In order to make a change in the African American community Hill recommends that there needs to be a change in family values, changes in the community and lastly, family structure. For the betterment of the community, the way African American families are structured today needs to change.

Clarence Earl Walker in his article entitled *Breaking Strongholds in the African American Family* (1996) states that black families are starting to become “dysfunctional.” Walker addresses the problems in the current African American family structure opposed to the stronger family values that were shared by previous generations.

K. Sue Jewell in her book *Survival of the Black Family: The Institutional Impact of American Social Policy* (2003) discussed the factors that need to be taken in order save the African American community in order to save them from further economic despair. Jewell suggested that if the African American community focuses more on socio-psychological issues rather than just economics, it would do well.

In 2005 Dr. Bengtson a current professor at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles wrote an article on the importance of extended families. In his article Bengtson explains how extended families are the most valuable resource for families in the 21st century. According to Bengtson nuclear families do not provide the strong family ties and support system that are found within extended families. Having a strong support system and even stronger family ties are factors that are needed for the young youth of today.

In 2006 Jennifer Baker conducted a survey that was published by the Forest Institute of Professional Psychology in Springfield, Missouri. The survey was on rates in divorce in the United States. Baker’s survey consists of subsections including gender and age. The rates in divorce in the United States have doubled since the early 19th century. Divorce is a common reason for the decline in extended families. When the divorce rate was lower the number of extended families was at a greater rate.

In order to fully understand the importance of extended families one must first identify where the concept first evolved. The book *Black Families* (2007) fully discusses where the exact origin of the term extended families evolved. In this paper it is stated that extended families evolved in times of economic hardships but it is not defined where. Extended families evolved in indigenous African societies, the tradition was brought to America through slaves in 1619. Before the term extended families were used these households were known as compounds.

William A. Havilands’ book, *Cultural Anthropology: The Human Challenge* (2010), focused on the 192 different countries in which extended families exist. Haviland states that in those countries 48 percent of families practice the concept of extended families. In retrospect he defined the term opposite of extended families which is nuclear families. Nuclear families defined by the author are, “smallest family unit consisting of one and or two parents. In the 1950’s around 60 percent turned into this model of living.

Most recently, many researchers searched for reasons that caused the decline of extended families. Michael Rendall for example published an article in *Journal of Marriage and Family* (2011) giving his theory on the subject. According to Rendall natural disasters are a common factor in the decline of extended families. Another contributing factor is the increase of divorce rates.

The previous sources provide a plethora of different insights on topics discussed in this paper. Along with the information collected from these sources this paper states why there is such a drastic need for extended families in the African American community. The research conducted in this paper also includes various factors that contributed to the decline in extended families.

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The theory used to guide this study is the Social Learning Theory, which is defined as “people learn behaviors based on the behaviors of those around them” (*Dictionary.com*). This theory is applicable to the examination of the importance of extended families by stating that if children were raised in extended families rather than nuclear, families they would have more of a sense of togetherness in their families.

This theory is beneficial because it can be utilized to probe the roles of each family member in a positive manner. It can also be employed to provide an alternative approach to fix the economic dilemma with which thousands of African Americans are struggling today.

The Social Learning Theory is utilized in this study to explain how a positive environment can contribute to better living conditions and more awareness of family togetherness. African Americans who were born in nuclear families might have been raised with a better ideal view of family, if they were born into extended families.

The methodological approach used in this study is qualitative. Theodore Greenstein in his book, *Methods of Family Research*, states that the qualitative method is important for family researchers because the “focus is not on identifying structural or demographic trends in families, but rather on the process by which families create” (2006:86). The aspects that make this study qualitative are that the information is provided through words rather than numbers to focus the importance of extended families in the African-American community. The qualitative technique is important because it helps one to gather data in order to get a better understanding of human behavior.

This method allows one to test the hypothesis. This study, which states that if more African American communities start to utilize the extended family rather than the nuclear family, they will have a more in-depth sense of togetherness in their families. The unit of analysis in the study is the African American because this study focuses on change in the African American culture through different types of family structures. The level of analysis is macro rather than micro because the paper studies the entire African American community rather than a small portion.

Data were collected through the use of the document analysis technique, conducting interviews with experts, the Internet, and various books and articles on the subject. The factor that shaped the choice of the data collection technique was the fact that many studies have been conducted and experts are available on the subject.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis conducted on this paper consists of five different subsections. The first subsection focuses on reasons for the existence multigenerational families. The second subsection gives statistics on African American family's income and crime rate shortly after concept of nuclear families arose. The third subsection provides possible reasons for the decline in extended families. The forth subsection focuses on the importance of extended families.

4.1. The Reasons for Multigenerational Families

In the 1880s the ideas of extended families multigenerational families (multigenerational families) began to outweigh the number of nuclear families of that time period. The concept of extended families was highly beneficial because it eliminated high cost of living while decreasing economic troubles. In addition to extended families producing a decline in economic troubles it also created an effective method of raising children. During economic hardships it became hard for parents to maintain control over their children. Factors such as; low levels of income, the high cost of living, and the high cost of education made it difficult for nuclear families to maintain their social status.

Unfortunately, there soon became a decline of extended families in the African American community especially. The decline of the extended families occurred mainly because of increasing opportunities for young adults and also the declining parental control over their children. Urbanization played a major role in the decline of extended

families. With the new model that began to shape the way families were “suppose” to be also came along with the increase in single-parent households and a high number of low income families.

4.2. Statistical Analysis

As previously stated, with the decline of extended families, which created a high number of low-income families in 1997, the annually income for African Americans was merely \$25,050 compared to that of their White counterparts which was \$40,557. In single parent households African Americans only accumulated roughly \$17,962 while White single parents made \$25,670. The median net worth in households headed by older people increased from 1984 to 1999 by 70 percent. In addition to low income for African Americans families there has also grew a extremely high poverty rate for African American households. Since the 1880s the poverty rate grew to 26.5 and today the average is even higher.

Shortly after the decline of extended families, there grew an increasingly high crime rate in the African American community. Today 65 percent of inmates in State or Federal prisons are Black. It is estimated due to current statistics that 28 percent of males with African descent will enter a prison at some point in his lifetime. Black on Black crime is the most common type of crime in the Black community. Black on Black crime not only consists of violent acts it also consists of non-violent acts although those crimes are reported less

4.3. Reasons for a Decline in Extended Families

According to an article published in *Journal of Marriage and Family* (2011) by Michael Rendall natural disasters can be a common factor on the decline of extended families. An example of this could be Hurricane Katrina which struck New Orleans and was categorized as the one of five deadliest hurricanes in the history of the United States. Urbanization is also a factor that contributed to the decline of extended families in America. As a result of urbanization, which drastically developed in the 19th century, families began move from their big multigenerational homes in the country to start their own life in the cities. In the 1880s only fifteen percent of the population lived in cities today a little more than eighty percent of the population occupies the cities. Fortunately for the concept of extended families the process of urbanization is slowly coming to an end.

Another possible reason for the decline in the concept of extended families is the increasing rate of divorce. Table 1 shows the divorce rates in America according to Jennifer Baker of the Forest Institute of Professional Psychology in Springfield, Missouri.

Table 1: Divorce rates in America based on gender and age

Age	Women	Men
Under 20 years old	27.6%	11.7%
20 to 24 years old	36.6%	38.8%
25 to 29 years old	16.4%	22.3%
30 to 34 years old	8.5%	11.6%
35 to 39 years old	5.1%	6.5%

Source: Forest Institute of Professional Psychology

Divorce not only affects the two people that were in the marriage but is also affects the whole family. With such high divorce rates marriage as an institution between two people has begun to decline because people are starting to lose faith that their marriage will last. The tradition of marriage is no longer sacred. High rates of divorces are common among African Americans. In fact, over the past couple of years the rate of divorce in the African American community has increased drastically in comparison to that of the early 19th century. The decline in successful marriages plays a major role in the decrease of extended families.

4.4 Importance of Extended Families

"Multi-generational bonds represent a valuable resource for families in the 21st century and are becoming more important than nuclear family ties for well-being and support over the course of our lives." The previous quote was taken from an article entitled *Importance of Family* written in 2005 by Dr. Bengtson. Dr. Vern Bengtson is currently a professor of gerontology and sociology at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles explaining the importance of extended families. Research conducted by Joan Aldous proved that there is more of a need for extended families rather than nuclear families. Extended families provide a better source of shelter as well as providing economic, religious, legal and recreational needs for African Americans. The lack of African American extended families has caused African American communities begin to lose their sense of togetherness, which is a necessity to building a strong community. The original purpose of the family in the African American culture is beginning to lose its original value.

5. Conclusion

What is the importance of extended families in the African American culture? Why is it even important to have extended families rather than nuclear families in relation to the African American community? This paper answered these and other questions pertaining to the topic of extended families in the Black community. Using the Social Learning Theory, this paper supported the hypothesis that if more African American communities begin to utilize the extended family concept, they will have more of a sense of togetherness in their families. This will end a lot of socioeconomic problems faced by the African American community because the families will have a larger income if multiple generations lived under one roof rather than multiple different homes. This paper conducted an extensive research collected through qualitative data in scholarly sources and people interviews to demonstrate whether extended families are more beneficial for African Americans than nuclear families.

In order for future researchers to acquire more extensive knowledge on the topic discussed in this paper, it may be beneficial to do the following: interview individuals who were or are currently members of extended families and compare their response to those of individuals who were or are currently members of nuclear families. By conducting these interviews, the findings would provide more personal examples to further test the validity of the hypothesis.

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